



GAMES NEWS

■ GTA IN SEX SCANDAL

The release of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas on the PC was hit by stories of a patch that let players see sex scenes in the game. The patch, called Hot Coffee, was released with the claim that it opened scenes left in by the developer.

Rockstar denounced the work as that of "a determined group of hackers who have gone to significant trouble to alter scenes in the official version of the game". Doubt was soon cast on this claim, though, as people found that the sex scenes also appear in the PlayStation 2 version, which comes on an unalterable DVD. Further investigation has shown this to be true.

However, getting to see these scenes is a difficult procedure that takes a good few hours of gameplay. Hillary Clinton has joined the ranks of people calling for the game to be banned, but we think it's an excellent game (see our review, right) designed for adults.

■ GOT A GOLDEN TICKET?

Tying in with Tim Burton's big-screen version of the Roald Dahl book, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is now available for the PC. The game strays slightly from the film and has Charlie cleaning up after the other kids and fixing broken machinery along the way.

Burton contributed some

ideas to the game, while Johnny Depp lent his likeness to game's version of Wonka. The game is available now and costs £20.



REVIEW ACTION GAME

ROCKSTAR Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.mx2.co.uk

DETAILS www.rockstargames.com



The *Miami Vice*-style, 80s-based Grand Theft Auto: Vice City was a hard act to follow, but Rockstar has managed it with San Andreas. This time the action has been transplanted to California in the early 90s. Playing Carl 'CJ' Johnson, it's your job to find out who killed your mom, crack down on the police blackmailing you and reclaim the 'hood from the neighbouring gang.

Rockstar has done something that's all too rare in modern games: it has thought about a plot and varied the missions. Best of all, the game gives you complete freedom. As in the previous games, you can drive round the city jacking cars, robbing people and even earning money driving a taxi.

When you feel up to progressing through the plot you simply drive to the locations shown on the map and trigger one of the set missions. These are hugely varied and take in street racing, burglary, assassinations and even jumping from one aeroplane to another. You can switch to a different mission strand before completing the first, too, so one tricky mission needn't hold up your progress.

The game takes place in three cities – thinly disguised versions of LA, San Francisco and Las Vegas – and completing a set of missions in each city leads you to the next. Each city has its own range of vehicles and progressively harder missions.

One of GTA's biggest draws is its range of vehicles, all of which you can steal. There's the standard array of safe family vehicles, but there are



Still got love for the streets? Then get San Andreas

also sports cars, motorbikes, jet planes, helicopters and even a jet pack. You can engage in a little drive-by shooting from most of them, too. When you're in a vehicle you can tune the radio and listen to the station playing your favourite 90s music.

Playing the game with the mouse and keyboard isn't as easy as using a joystick, so we recommend that you buy one. As soon as you do, it becomes a lot easier. Driving is particularly good fun and feels realistic: blown-out tyres and general damage affect how the car handles. Many games developers could learn a lot from playing this.

The graphics look great on a high-resolution monitor and the map, which was hard to read on the PlayStation 2 version, works better here. With hours and hours of play – it could take a couple of months to complete – excellent graphics and great missions, it's the best game to hit the PC in a long time. The adult nature of the game means that it's not one for the kids, though.

David Ludlow

✓ Excellent missions; great graphics; superb soundtrack

✗ Works better with a joystick

REQUIREMENTS Windows 2000/XP, 1GHz Pentium III processor, 256MB RAM, 3.6GB disk space. **Product code** GTASA/PCORING/E

HOTLIST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

Half-Life 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

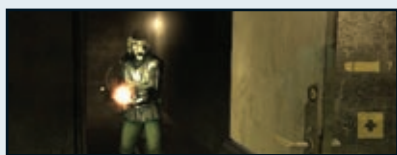
SUPPLIER www.cdwow.com

DETAILS www.half-life2.com



Half-Life 2 was a year overdue, but it was well worth the wait. It is one of the most involving first-person shooters we've ever played and it will quickly drag you into the plot. It is designed with lush graphics that run well, even on older systems, making it a game that everyone can enjoy. Only an annoying online registration process mars the game.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 1.2GHz processor, 256MB RAM (2GB, 512MB recommended), 4.5GB disk space. **Product code** B00009ATWC



HOTLIST SIM AND BATTLE GAME

Stronghold 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18 inc VAT

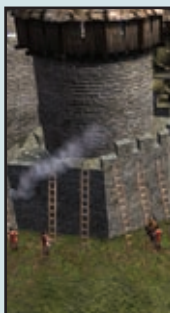
SUPPLIER www.play.com

DETAILS www.stronghold2.com



The sequel to 2001's sleeper hit, Stronghold 2 takes all the castle-building fun of the first game and makes it even better. This time around you can choose to play the sim game, where you must keep your citizens happy, or the war game, where you battle against the computer for control of the map. There's loads of gameplay in this innovative game, which should keep you busy for hours at a time.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 1.4GHz Pentium 4, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 2.5GB disk space. **Product code** B0007GIXOW



HOTLIST ONLINE ADVENTURE GAME

City of Heroes

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £18, then £9 monthly

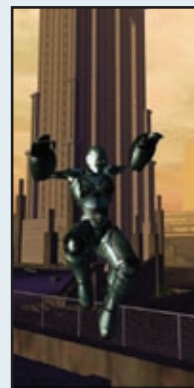
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk

DETAILS <http://uk.cityofheroes.com>



If you've always longed to clamber into a spandex suit and fight crime, City of Heroes is the game for you. This internet adventure puts you in a city full of other human-controlled heroes. There are plenty of missions and monthly updates. This game is lots of fun, although gameplay may be too simplistic for some.

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98, 800MHz Pentium III, 256MB RAM, 2GB disk space, net access. **Product code** B0006IS3NW



REVIEW ONLINE SHOOTER**EA GAMES
Battlefield 2**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £27 inc VAT (DVD);

£25 inc VAT (CD-ROM)

SUPPLIER www.cd-wow.comDETAILS www.eagames.com

Battlefield 1942 shook the PC gaming world when it was released in 2002. It took the basic online shooter and added lots of players, big maps and vehicles of all descriptions. All this was dressed up to look like World War II, although the emphasis was more on fun than historical re-enactment.

After an add-on based in Vietnam, the developer has released the true successor. Here modern forces use the latest military hardware to battle for supremacy over 12 varied maps. Each map also scales to three different sizes to accommodate smaller or larger games.

You have a choice of division, which includes special forces, medic, assault, engineer and so on. Based on your decision you receive different weapons and special equipment such as mines, medical kits and body armour.

All divisions can drive any of the vehicles in the game. On land these range from Hummers with mounted machine guns to tanks. In the air there are a variety of helicopters and fighter jets, although you will need a joystick to gain full control over them. Each of the three factions has its own set of vehicles. The gameplay model is well balanced with every vehicle having its natural prey and nemesis.

The game supports up to 64 players online and provides integrated voice commands. Players can organise themselves into six-man squads for support. One player on each side is elected as a commander, who can call up radar scans or air strikes to support his team. This adds a level of organisation to an otherwise very chaotic game.

This is an amazing online combat experience that has everything you could want. The graphics look fantastic, especially considering the size of the battlefields. Combat is frantic, and feels polished whether you're on foot or in a vehicle. This will be the number one online shooter of the year.

Seth Barton



Brilliant battlefield chaos; great graphics



High system requirements; only worth playing online

REQUIREMENTS Windows XP, 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM, 2.3GB disk space. **Product code** B0006V5LEU



Wrapping a towel round his head wasn't going to provide much protection from that tank

REVIEW ZOO SIMULATION**MINDSCAPE
Zoo Vet**

RATING ★★★

PRICE £10 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.mindscape.co.ukDETAILS www.amazon.co.uk

If you think there's too much violence in games, Mindscape's Zoo Vet should redress the balance a little. Rather than injuring things, it's your job as the zoo's new vet to diagnose and treat the animals as they get sick.

Designed for children, the game is largely educational. A quiz mode helps children learn animal trivia before you let them go all James Herriot on the wildlife.

There are 25 animals to treat, including lions, bears, otters and penguins, and 30 different scenarios to work through. Each level presents a different selection of animals to work with, and you have to treat each one to progress.

The animal graphics are well created but can appear cartoon-like at times, and the backdrops look dated. There's also little realism when operating on animals, but with children in mind the lack of gore is hardly a problem.

Tackling each animal follows roughly the same pattern. You have a range of examination tools to hand and are asked questions on the results. For example, when taking an animal's temperature you're asked if the results are normal or not. Each correct answer earns you points. However, some tasks become repetitive.

Other jobs including taking blood samples, removing stones from hooves and medicating diseased animals. Children follow the onscreen clues to choose the right course of action.

The worst that can happen if you're a little too slash happy with the scalpel is that you are taken off the case. Usually, though, some heavy voice hints point you in the right direction. These reminders mean the game is better suited to young children, as they need more guidance.

This is a great introduction to the veterinary world, although once the 30 missions are over there's little to draw you back.

David Ludlow



Teaches children about animal care; large range of animals



Can get repetitive; graphics look dated

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, 400MHz Pentium III processor, 128MB RAM. **Product code** B0007VHHUS



Some of Zoo Vet's more repetitive tasks might end up sending your kids to sleep – just like Bubbles here

REVIEW RACING GAME**MILESTONE
S.C.A.R**

RATING ★★★

PRICE £15 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.simplygames.comDETAILS www.milestone.it

When you think of fast, exciting cars, Ferraris are probably further up the list than Alfa Romeos. Milestone hopes that Squadra Corse Alfa Romeo (S.C.A.R) will show off the brand's potential with its realistic racing simulation. Sadly, it's a dull and plodding affair that won't have teenage boys ripping their Modena posters off the wall.

While the cars handle realistically, thanks to the physics engine, there's no fun or pleasure in the driving. Rather than swinging wildly round corners you're limited to a more pedestrian rate. This realism certainly doesn't extend to the way damage is handled, either. No matter how hard you crash, the worst harm your Alfa ever displays is a bumper that hangs slightly at the rear.

However, each knock takes points off your car's damage bar, and when it hits zero your car dies. This system is frustrating to say the least and more at home in a beat-'em-up. Even driving on the grass reduces the bar, so a few off-road trips can destroy your car, which is hardly realistic.

Some nice ideas have been thrown into the mix, including driver upgrades. These include intimidation, higher levels of which cause your opponents to make more mistakes when you're close; heart, which improves your driver's health; and car handling.

There's also the rather odd Tiger Mode, which lets you rewind a few seconds of the game to correct mistakes. It feels completely out of place in what's supposed to be a racing simulation.

The graphics are good with detailed backdrops and well-constructed car models, but it's nothing you won't have seen before in other racing games.

S.C.A.R has a stab at introducing some interesting ideas into a racing game but it falls short. It's the Sunday driver of the racing genre, and there are plenty of more exciting titles available.

David Ludlow



Detailed graphics



Poor damage system; lacks excitement

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or above, Intel Pentium III processor, 64MB RAM, 580MB disk space. **Product code** B0009P7W30



Born to be mild: S.C.A.R takes the driving simulator to new levels of tedium with its company car edition